

# . Main/An Analysis Of The Overseas Handling Of Front Mission

## An Analysis Of The Overseas Handling Of Front Mission

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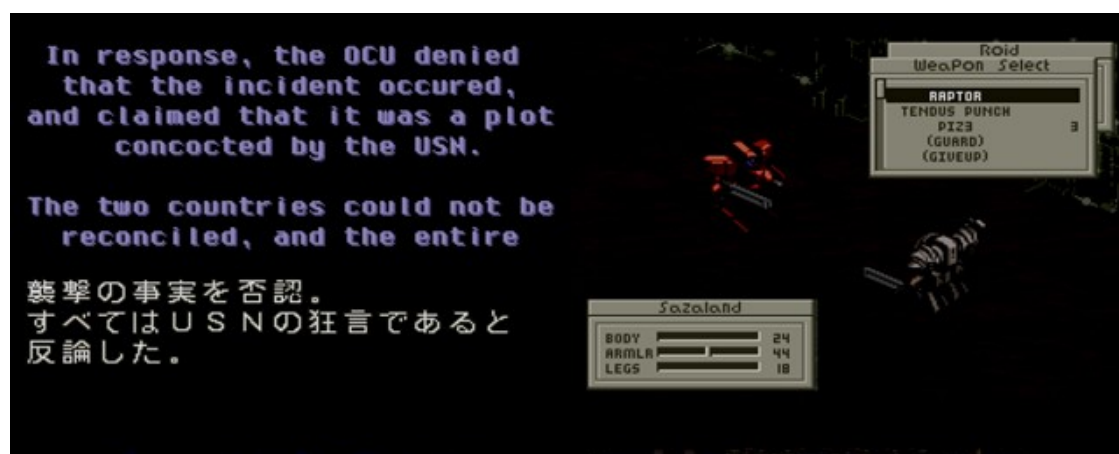
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### Introduction

In 1994, a young Toshiro Tsuchida planned to create a new intellectual property (IP) that would break away from the Japanese norm and eventually become an international sensation. After having made numerous action and shooter-based video games that catered to the niches in Japan, Tsuchida wanted to craft something that could be enjoyed by people all over the world. This IP would later be given the name **Front Mission**. While Front Mission has transcended its video game roots and has withstood the tests of time in Japan, its overseas reception has been shockingly poor.

There are many possible reasons that can be given for this, but it really comes down to just one – Front Mission's overseas handling. Whether it was by canceling in-progress localizations, censoring mature story events, or poorly marketing the localized releases, Square Co., Ltd. and Square Enix Co., Ltd. should be very ashamed of the missed golden opportunities they had to turn Front Mission into an international sensation.

### Front Mission





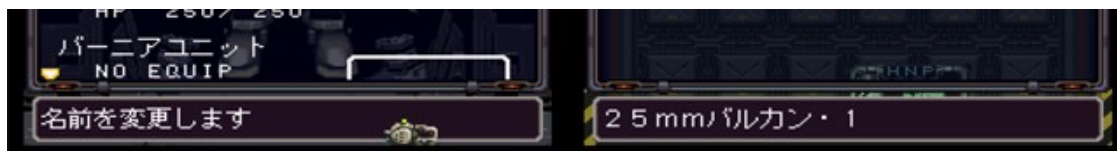
Front Mission's English portions, in preparation for localization.

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It would not be long before Western magazine publications such as GamePro and Electronic Gaming Monthly were covering the English localization of Front Mission. The video game, along with Bahamut Lagoon, were being localized and prepared for release in the Western markets. However, these localization efforts were eventually canceled by Square Co., Ltd. No reason for this cancellation exists, although one could argue that it would not be financially beneficial as 1995 represented the twilight years of the Super Famicom.

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Almost a year after Front Mission was released, Front Mission: Gun Hazard saw the light of day for the Super Famicom on February 23, 1996. Co-developed by G-Craft and Omiya Soft, the video game had been partially translated into English in preparation for an overseas releases. Front Mission: Gun Hazard received attention from Western magazine publications, just like Front Mission was a year ago. Sadly, there was no hints of localization in the aforementioned publications. One could argue that the video game's late release in 1996 was a significant factor for Square Co., Ltd. not to localize it into English, as very few Japanese Super Famicom games were released overseas at this point.

## Front Mission 2



Front Mission 2's English portions, in preparation for localization.

More than a year later since Front Mission: Gun Hazard, Front Mission 2 was released for the Sony PlayStation on September 25, 1997. Representing the new age of gaming technology and 3D visuals at the time, Front Mission 2 was a critical and commercial success. The video game was also featured in many import gaming columns from Western magazine publications. In a more aggressive push to introduce Front Mission outside of Japan, G-Craft hired more English translators and editors for the project. The end result was a video game which had significantly more English text than what one could find in a Japanese-developed product; roughly 30% of

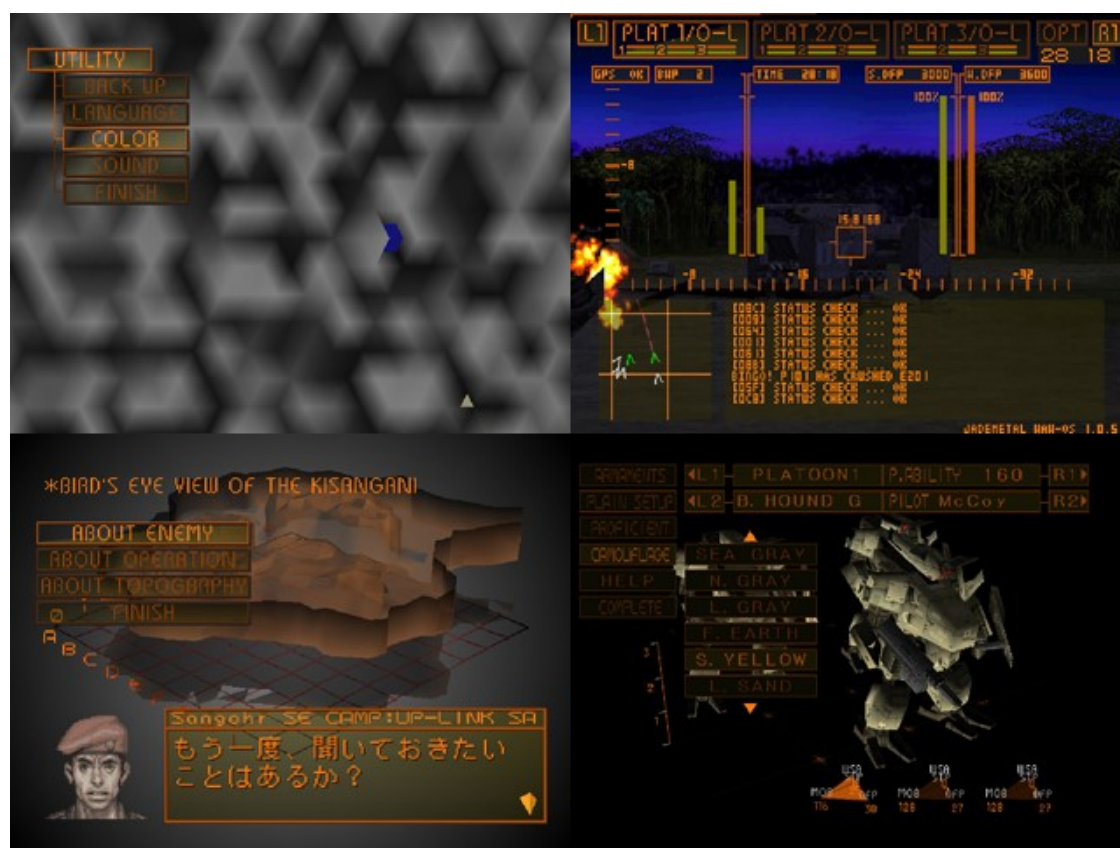


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Sakamoto did admit, however, that the aforementioned content would not be out of place in the modern gaming industry (a result of the acceptance of mature games such as **Grand Theft Auto** or **Max Payne**).

## Front Mission Alternative



Front Mission Alternative's English portions, in preparation for localization.

## [English Preview, GameFan Magazine](#)

Months after Front Mission 2, Front Mission Alternative became the second release for the PlayStation on December 18, 1997. Like the Front Mission titles before it, it was developed with localization in mind. Unlike the previous games, Front Mission Alternative included an option to change the user interface from Japanese to English text at any given time. This option also changed all of the game data as well, leaving only the story events still in Japanese. Just like with Front Mission 2, a significant amount of the work needed for a proper localization was taken care of by the developers. A localization was indeed in the works according to a preview in magazine publication, GameFan, in summer 1997. Sadly, Square Co., Ltd. did nothing with the localization, and allowed Front Mission Alternative to remain Japan-only.

## Front Mission 3



A portion of Front Mission 3's localization blunders. Mistakes shown: Emir Klamsky (correct: Emir Kramskoi), Grezex (correct: Grille Sechs), Rekson (correct: Recson), and ROFUpI (correct: Speed I).

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After four failed attempts to introduce Front Mission overseas, Square Co., Ltd. finally decides to actually take advantage of the opportunity given to them. A few months after Front Mission 3 was released for the PlayStation on September 2, 1999 in Japan, it was eventually released in North American and European markets. All of this sounds great for everyone outside of Japan, right? Not quite. Despite going through with the localization process, the company decided that Front Mission 3 was a little too mature for the Western markets...and censored the video game. A notable censor involved the graphic suicide of one of Front Mission 3's antagonists. Likewise, the storyline saw numerous edits to eliminate any form of continuity from the previous Front Mission titles. This was likely done as no other Front Mission title had seen the light of day outside Japan.

Finally, the quality of the localization itself was poor; grammar mistakes were easy to pick up and amateurish translation mistakes were well evident in the most simplest of things – names, places, etc. Some of this can be attributed to the fact that Front Mission 3 was the first localized title, but even then, many of the mistakes made shouldn't even be there.

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[FrontMissionSeries](#)

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## PartTwo

### An Analysis Of The Overseas Handling Of Front Mission

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#### Front Mission First

Upon the localized releases of Front Mission 3, it would be a few years before another Front Mission title was released. On November 23, 2003, a remake of the original Front Mission titled **Front Mission First** was released in Japan for the PlayStation under the Front Mission Project line. With the inclusion of a second campaign and new plot linkages with another upcoming Front Mission title in Front Mission 4, Western magazine publications were hinting that the game was planned for localization. Unfortunately, this never came to fruition and the newly-formed Square Enix Co., Ltd. never revealed any plans for it.

#### Front Mission History

Despite the shockingly poor handling of Front Mission overseas, the developers from G-Craft and who made up the newly-formed Product Development Division 6 (PDD6) at Square Enix Co., Ltd. devised a means for overseas audiences to get quickly caught up with Front Mission. A compilation of Front Mission First, Front Mission 2, and Front Mission 3 was released in Japan on December 11, 2003 under the title **Front Mission History**. In an interview with Japanese magazine publication Dengeki Games on Front Mission's future, PDD6 developers revealed plans to have the compilation made available outside of Japan sometime in 2004.

The reasoning given behind the plan was that Front Mission 3 had been localized, and that Front Mission and Front Mission 2 were already partially in English to begin with. Additionally, doing both localizations at the same time would save a great deal of time and money. Unfortunately, history repeated itself when Square Enix Co., Ltd. rejected PDD6's localization plan.

#### Front Mission 4

A portion of Front Mission 4's localization blunders. The U.S.N. naming convention was changed to U.C.S. for the localized version; no reasoning was given.

[Original Iron Cross VS Censored, Edited Cross Symbol Comparisons](#)

The release of Front Mission 4 for the Sony PlayStation 2 in Japan on December 18, 2003 was followed up with news of an English localization underway. During Spring of 2004, the video game was released in North America. Square Enix Co., Ltd. put in a better effort with quality this time around, and seemed to have learned from their

mistakes. However, a closer look at the localized version reveals a familiar situation from Front Mission 3 – censorship. Replacing the Iron Cross with a new cross symbol, coarse language toned down, and mature story content replaced with new dialogue were evident in the English version. Furthermore, the same blunders on the basic game data were noticeable. Lastly, plot linkages were once again swept aside so Front Mission 4 appeared purely standalone.

The biggest handling flaw of Front Mission 4 did not lie in the localization itself. Rather, it was most evident in its marketing. Front Mission 3 had limited marketing and did not have huge print runs in North America or Europe. Square Enix Co., Ltd. tried to change this by putting a good deal of marketing into Front Mission 4, with demo discs and mini-strategy guides being a few of the promotional items they released. They also produced a significantly large print run...which unfortunately proved to be Front Mission 4's demise. By overestimating its sales potential, Square Enix Co., Ltd. faced financial losses as many copies of the video game remained unsold at many retailers.

## **Front Mission 2089**

Front Mission 2089's English portions, in preparation for localization.

Front Mission 2089 was released on March 7, 2005 for the Japanese mobile phone market under the Front Mission Mobile line. As a mobile phone game, it was never considered for a localization. Front Mission 2089, however, was still developed with an overseas release in mind as its user interfaces and game data were in English.

## **Front Mission: Online**

[English Alpha Test Application, Page 1](#) | [Page 2](#)

[English Alpha Test Registration Site](#)

[Interview with Tom Slattery](#)

During Fall of 2004, PDD6 began beta testing of their newest product – Front Mission: Online. Still determined to push Front Mission abroad, the developers tailored the video game specifically for an English release. Front Mission: Online had user interfaces and game data that were completely in English, as well as voice-overs completely in English. To prove that they were very serious about a localization, PDD6 allowed testing sessions to commence in North America. A select number of North American people were allowed to participate in the video game's English alpha testing sessions, which took place sometime after the Japanese release of the game in May 12, 2005 for the PlayStation 2 and December 8, 2005 for the Windows PC. Tom Slattery, a former translator for Square Enix Co., Ltd., confirmed this alpha test in a recent interview with RPGamer.

With a very high concentration of the Front Mission: Online's text being in English, it was eventually revealed that a North American release was indeed being worked on. In a move that took even PDD6 by surprise, Square Enix Co., Ltd. canceled the North American localization in its latter stages. No reason was given for this course of action.

## **Front Mission 5: Scars of the War**

Front Mission 5: Scars of the War; it was not tailored for an overseas release.

Billed as the “main event” of the Front Mission Project line, Front Mission 5: Scars of the War was released for the PlayStation 2 in Japan on December 29, 2005. The video game also marked the first time that a Front Mission title was not tailored towards an overseas localization. Aside from some game data and bits of the user interfaces, Front Mission 5: Scars of the War was largely in Japanese. There were rumors that the video game was being planned for a localization, but these were revealed to be unfounded and baseless. However, as there was a copyright issue between Square Enix Co., Ltd. and another party over the subtitle, some believe that there were plans to release Front Mission 5: Scars of the War in English. So, what exactly happened here?

Well, for starters, the video game never was considered for a localization. Before anyone begins to point fingers at

Front Mission 4 and its poor reception, that was never really much of a relevant factor. Rather, it all comes down to the simple fact that Square Co., Ltd. and Square Enix Co., Ltd. never really allowed the franchise to thrive overseas. Specifically, overseas markets did not have access to the full selection of Front Mission titles that were available in Japan. This fact makes much more sense when one takes into account Front Mission's serialized storytelling approach. Serialized stories are meant to work as a whole, and taking out any parts of it leaves the story ultimately unresolved.

Front Mission 5: Scars of the War takes into account that the player at the very least has experienced Front Mission, Front Mission 2, Front Mission 3, and Front Mission 4. Other titles such as Front Mission Alternative, Front Mission: Online, Front Mission 2089, and Front Mission 2089-II also matter, but not as much as the main four numbered ones. Around the time of its release, only two had been localized overseas – Front Mission 3 and Front Mission 4. As the video game requires above-average knowledge of Front Mission in general, would it really have been a good idea to go ahead and do a localization with so few Front Mission titles accessible? No.

What did PDD6 have to say about this? Here is a translated excerpt from an interview with Dengeki Games in 2006...

*Q (Dengeki): I know you get these kinds of questions a lot, but I want to ask you about Front Mission overseas. There's a lot of talk going on about how Front Mission 5: Scars of the War is not being localized. What can you tell us about this situation?*

***A: (Toshiro Tsuchida) Hahaha, yes we certainly have been asked about this before! No, Front Mission 5: Scars of the War will not be getting overseas releases. Although I can tell you that it was on our minds, we did not tailor the game for localization. Before you ask why, let me present you with my own question.***

***Would you watch a final season of a TV serial drama with access to only some of its seasons?***

*Dengeki: No, I would never do that! If I liked a TV serial drama and wanted to watch its final season, I would do everything I can to watch the seasons before it! I believe that if you haven't seen the previous seasons, you have no business watching the show's concluding one!*

***Tsuchida: Apply that same logic to Front Mission because that's exactly why we can't release 5 outside of Japan! The only one to blame for letting this happen is our company management. They're the ones who let the golden opportunities slip away, you know. We've done all we can to make the language and region transition as smooth as possible for most of the games, but head management never thought it was worth the risk.***

***They had chances to correct their mistakes over the years and sadly, they did not deliver. They missed the first four titles, didn't bother with the History compilation, and canceled Online's release abroad. Only 3 and 4 are available in the West...5 revolves mainly around 1st and 2...and Alternative, Online, and 2089 are also relevant. Why bother releasing the final "season" if you've never even watched the first few, let alone the spin-offs? You reap what you sow.***

## Front Mission 2089-II

Front Mission 2089-II's English portions, in preparation for localization.

Front Mission 2089-II was released on September 15, 2006 for the Japanese mobile phone market under the Front Mission Mobile line. As a mobile phone game, it was never considered for a localization. Front Mission 2089-II, however, was still developed with an overseas release in mind as its user interfaces and game data were in English.

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# PartThree

## An Analysis Of The Overseas Handling Of Front Mission

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1. [Front Mission First \(Nintendo DS\)](#)
  2. [Front Mission 2089: Border of Madness](#)
  3. [Front Mission Evolved](#)
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### Front Mission First (Nintendo DS)

#### [Original, Fan-made VS Official, Censored English Localization Comparisons](#)

Using the leftover budget from the Front Mission Project, PDD6 created an enhanced port for Front Mission First on the Nintendo DS. It was released in Japan on March 22, 2007. Of all versions of the original Front Mission, it is this one that finally receives an overseas release. Largely thanks to a certain, passionate developer who felt that Front Mission 3 and Front Mission 4 proved there were fans in the West, Square Enix Co., Ltd. decided to localize Front Mission First. The release was marred by the same problems found from the previous two localizations – censorship ([which Sakamoto admitted was done to appeal to a younger audience](#)), sloppy mistakes on basic game data, and continuity elements less pronounced on both campaigns.

The localization faults were minor compared to what Square Enix Co. Ltd. decided to do with Front Mission First's marketing. Unlike Front Mission 3 and Front Mission 4, no marketing campaign was done whatsoever. Nothing on TV, print, and barely anything online. In fact, because the company was a no-show in terms of advertisements, ***the only way anyone would know about the release was through word-of-mouth.***

### Front Mission 2089: Border of Madness

Front Mission 2089: Border of Madness; it was not tailored for an overseas release.

A year after the release of the enhanced Front Mission First, PDD6 launched a remake of Front Mission 2089 titled **Front Mission 2089: Border of Madness**. It was released for the Nintendo DS on May 29, 2008. Like Front Mission 5: Scars of the War, the video game had not been tailored for release outside of Japan. The chance for an official localization still exists to this day, but it is very low and will likely not happen.

### Front Mission Evolved



A portion of Front Mission Evolved's localization blunders. A notable mistake shown is Rexon; this was first incorrect in Front Mission 3 as Rekson, but corrected in Front Mission 4 as Recson.

Front Mission Evolved, which was just released last year on the Sony PlayStation 3, Microsoft Xbox 360, and the PC, marks the first and only time that Square Enix Co., Ltd. handled a Front Mission title well to some degree. A decent marketing campaign was done across various media, and it seemed like the company admitted they've done a poor job of handling the franchise in the past. Still, that did not mean that the localization effort was flawless as errors were found. In particular, the localizations for game data were done poorly. Naming conventions that had been fixed from Front Mission 3 via Front Mission First and Front Mission 4 did not stay static in Front Mission Evolved; they were subject to unnecessary changes. It's common practice within the gaming industry to honor any continuity elements in a series of video games, and unfortunately Square Enix Co., Ltd. didn't get the memo.

## Conclusion

Although this article has not touched on the handling of Front Mission's expanded universe supplements, it's not hard to see why they would not be considered. After all, if a company could constantly make critical errors with their game localization attempts, why bother with the non-video game material? It's truly baffling how a large video game company could completely fail to do any justice to one of their most known and respected works outside of its homeland.

Front Mission is no Final Fantasy or Dragon Quest, but it's one of their longest running in-house franchises that has become a success across various media. Its video games perform reasonably well, its action figures sell like hotcakes, its books are perennial top-sellers among the mature/adult reader audience, and its other merchandise become rarities in a short period of time. Yet, while Front Mission is a beloved heirloom in Japan, it's almost a complete unknown in the Western world.

Alas, one can only imagine what would have happened if Square Co., Ltd. actually decided to take Front Mission seriously in the mid-1990s and released the video games without censoring them. One can dream about it, right?

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